

**CONNECTICUT STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION**  
**Hartford**

**Minutes**  
**State Board of Education Meeting**  
**July 14, 2020**

(Approved September 2, 2020)

Pursuant to notice filed with the Secretary of the State and posted on the agency's Web site, the State Board of Education (hereinafter "Board") met via GoToMeeting on Tuesday, July 14, 2020. This virtual meeting was livestreamed (<https://youtu.be/gPPnLDPKwWQ>.) to allow for public access.

**I. Call to Order**

Vice Chairperson Estela López called the meeting to order at 9:34 a.m.

Staff Assistant to the Board, Aldith Dewar, took an attendance roll call.

Present: Estela López, Vice Chairperson  
Erin D. Benham  
Bonnie E. Burr  
Erik M. Clemons  
Karen DuBois-Walton  
Elwood Exley, Jr.  
Donald F. Harris, Jr.  
Dr. Jane Gates for Mark Ojakian, Ex Officio  
Martha Paluch Prou  
Awilda Reasco  
Malia K. Sieve  
Robert J. Trefry, Ex Officio

Absent: Allan B. Taylor, Chairperson

**II. Public Participation**

Vice Chairperson López stated that public participation had been received online and was sent to the Board members. A total of 21 public participation emails were collected. Eight comments were regarding the reopening of schools, and 13 were regarding the Stamford Charter School for Excellence. The public participation comments were available on the website.

Vice Chairperson López shared that July 14<sup>th</sup> is Bastille Day. It commemorates the beginning of the French Revolution. The French Revolution adopted three words as its motto: Liberté, Égalité, and Fraternité: Liberty, Equality and Fraternity. Dr. López expressed that it is very appropriate that those three words still resonate with us especially in this time of a pandemic. We will make more impact working together as a community.

### **III. Executive Session**

The Board did not meet in executive session.

### **IV. Consideration of Minutes**

A roll call vote was taken for the minutes.

#### **A. June 17, 2020, State Board of Education Meeting**

Mrs. Benham moved, Mr. Clemons seconded, that the Board adopt the minutes of the June 17, 2020, State Board of Education Meeting.

#### **VOTE ON**

<b>MOTION:</b>	In favor:	Benham, Burr, Clemons, DuBois-Walton, Exley, Harris, López, Prou, Reasco, Sieve
	Opposed:	0
	Abstained:	0
	Absent:	Taylor

Motion carried unanimously.

### **V. Report of the Commissioner**

Commissioner Cardona thanked everyone for joining the meeting. He thanked the Board for being members of the Board and expressed how greatly important it was to hear from the members. We, being the Commissioner and the team at the Department appreciated the time and energy the members expend to serve on the Board.

Commissioner Cardona provided an updated summary of some of the activities at the agency.

He highlighted the following to give a sense of agency activities:

- Continuously meet with the Department of Public Health, the Governor and his team.
- Meeting with CAFE Board of Directors.
- Weekly educational partnership meetings with AFT, CEA, CAPSS, CAFE, and CAS.
- We continue with the Unified Command calls that are state run.
- Weekly updates to superintendents.
- Instituted Office Hours with our leadership team members for members of the Board just provide for question and answer or talk about some of the topics that we are working on day-to-day.

- Participation with the Lieutenant Governor's Coding Challenge.
- Participated in a Linked-In panel presentation in Waterbury with the Waterbury community.
- We participated in a Reopen Webinar: Adapt, Advance, Achieve: Connecticut's Plan to Learn and Grow Together, July 9, 2020.
- Met with the CAPSS Board of Directors to discuss and communicate reopening strategies.
- Commissioner Cardona was invited to be a part of the Connecticut's Resurgence Task Force to examine Connecticut's response to COVID if a resurgence happened.
- Reopening Plan. The SDE has been working on additional guidance with input from other agencies and input from the field. Some of the input will be regarding certification, remote learning for families who choose to keep their children home, early childhood practices, best practices for four and five year olds, music instruction, and chorus, in particular. Special Education is always an area that we want to refine guidance and Special Education Division Director Bryan Klimkiewicz is working closely with our partners to refine guidance.
- Our Fiscal Office is finalizing the CARES Act funding process. \$99 million will be distributed to the different municipalities to assist with the rollout of their fall plans.
- Deputy Commissioner Desi Nesmith and the Academic Team are working on closing the digital divide.
- Deputy Commissioner Charlene and her team are working to tighten the collaboration between our health partners to influence the guidance put forward to make sure that whatever we do is vetted and carefully examined by our partners in the health field.

## VI. Items Requiring Action

### A. Material Change to Stamford Charter School for Excellence

A panel consisting of Deputy Commissioner Desi Nesmith, Division Director Lisa Lamenzo, Principal of Stamford Charter School for Excellence Kevin Fisher, and Board Member and Parent Representative Stephany Smith, Stamford Charter School for Excellence, presented the Material Change to Stamford Charter School for Excellence report to the Board. Mrs. Sieve moved, Mrs. Reasco seconded, that the State Board of Education consider the following resolution:

**RESOLVED**, That the State Board of Education, pursuant to Section 10-66ss of the Connecticut General Statutes, and subject to the Commissioner's July 14, 2020, memorandum to the Board, "Material Change to Stamford Charter School for Excellence,"

approves the July 1, 2020, charter amendment proposal of Stamford Charter School for Excellence (SCSE) to the extent such proposal seeks modification of its grade configuration to add Grade 6 in 2020-21, Grade 7 in 2021-22, and Grade 8 in 2022-23 with a maximum approved enrollment cap of 392; and approves such request to the extent it seeks acquisition of an additional school building, and directs the Commissioner to take the necessary action; and be it further

**RESOLVED**, That the State Board of Education, pursuant to Section 10-66ss of the Connecticut General Statutes and subject to the Commissioner's July 14, 2020, memorandum to the Board, "Material Change to Stamford Charter School for Excellence," denies the July 1, 2020, charter amendment proposal of Stamford Charter School for Excellence to the extent such proposal seeks enrollment expansion beyond the current maximum approved enrollment cap of 392, and directs the Commissioner to take the necessary action.

Deputy Commissioner Nesmith introduced that Connecticut law requires a charter school that plans to make a material change to the school's operation must submit a request to amend its charter to the State Board of Education. The law defines a material change to be a change that fundamentally alters the charter school's mission, organizational structure, or educational program.

Division Director Lamenzo presented an overview that Stamford Charter School for Excellence submitted a formal charter amendment proposal on July 1, 2020, calling the State Board of Education to consider three amendments to its charter.

Division Director Lamenzo presented that **Table 1** showcased Stamford Charter School for Excellence's aspirations to increase enrollment to 560 by 2022-23. She stated that it had been communicated to Stamford Charter School for Excellence that this request for 560 enrollment cap was not financially viable at this time, and the school's maximum enrollment remained at 392 for the 2020-21 school year.

Division Director Lamenzo next presented Table 2. **Table 2** outlined Stamford Charter School for Excellence's plan for a PreK-8 within a 392 enrollment cap. If unable to increase enrollment, their proposal was to keep cohorts of 56 students per grade level and matriculate cohorts each year. She noted that when operating with such model, three grades will remain vacant at any given year. Division Director Lamenzo stated that on the basis of its demonstrated record of success, we recommend adding grades 6-8 over a three-year period with a maximum approved enrollment cap of 392. It was also recommended that Stamford Charter School for Excellence's charter be amended to authorize the school to acquire an additional school building.

Attorney Matthew Venhorst clarified for the Board that the enrollment 392 cap was an explicit part of its renewal in February 2020. Chief Financial Officer Kathy Demsey clarified for the Board that the funding was not available for 560 seats and Stamford Charter for Excellence had been made aware that the seats would have to stay at 392. Deputy Commissioner Nesmith clarified for the Board that 560 seats was not a recommendation of the Board report. He reminded the Board that we have additional charter schools that are approved and have not yet reached capacity as yet when it comes to the seats that they are chartered to serve.

The Board held discussion on not setting a precedent by voting on an enrollment expansion while knowing that funding or money was not allowed. Deputy Commissioner Nesmith reiterated that it had been made clear to Stamford Charter that an enrollment cap of 560 was not financially viable at this time and was not part of the recommendation. As communicated to SCSE, the school's maximum enrollment is capped at 392.

The Board further discussed SCSE scenarios of grade configuration of Grades 6, 7, and 8. A resolution was proposed for a pathway of Grade 6.

Mr. Harris moved, Mrs. Benham seconded, that the State Board of Education table the proposed resolution being considered to allow the Legal Department to rewrite the language of the proposed resolution. The Board unanimously agreed to the tabling of agenda item VI.A.

### **B. Approval of Limited Waiver of School Sessions for COVID-19 Re-entry Planning and Training**

Commissioner Cardona introduced that COVID-19 was ordered an emergency, a public health emergency by our Governor. He stated that the development of three plans: which include full in-person schooling, a hybrid, and remote learning versions would require additional planning, professional development, and procedures in order to maintain health and safety. The Commissioner requested that the Board waive the 180-day requirement and allow for up to three days to do additional preparation and training for teachers and staff to ensure health and safety for the upcoming school year.

Legal Director Jessa Mirtle clarified to the Board that this is a limited exercise of your authority to waive the 180-days essentially for up to three days for 177 days when those days are used prior to the start of the new school year and are used again for that additional safety training and building of capacity for safely transitioning back to school.

Mrs. Sieve moved, Mrs. Reasco seconded, the consideration of the resolution Approval of Limited Waiver of School Sessions for COVID-19 Re-entry Planning and Training.

WHEREAS, Connecticut General Statutes (C.G.S.) Section 10-15 requires that public schools be in session for at least 180 days during each year; and

WHEREAS, C.G.S. Section 10-15 permits the State Board of Education to authorize the shortening of any school year for a school district, a school, or a portion of a school, on account of an unavoidable emergency; and

WHEREAS, Governor Ned Lamont, on March 10, 2020, declared a public health emergency and civil preparedness emergency in connection with COVID-19; and

WHEREAS, due to these unprecedented circumstances related to this unavoidable public health emergency, and the necessity for school boards to safely prepare to maximize support and instruction during the 2020-2021 school year; now therefore be it:

**RESOLVED**, that the State Board of Education temporarily authorizes for Local and Regional Boards of Education, the Connecticut Technical Education Career System, approved state charter schools, and other similarly situated districts ("School District" or "School Districts"), a waiver of up to a maximum of 3 days from the 180-day requirement set forth in C.G.S. Section 10-15 for unavoidable emergency, to provide staff and families with additional time to build capacity to safely transition back to in-person classes.

Such waiver would be limited to instances where the School District uses the days prior to the beginning of the 2020-2021 school year.

These days may be used for the purposes including but not limited to for the following:

- (1) additional training and professional development days, beyond any typically scheduled days, to adjust to and educate on new requirements or policies related to health and safety in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic;
- (2) time for educators and staff to plan classroom set-up and consider changes to facilities required to maximize safety measures; and/or
- (3) provision of social-emotional services to staff, and training to prepare them to provide that support to students as the community transitions back into school buildings.

The Board directs the Commissioner to take the necessary action.

**VOTE ON**

<b>MOTION:</b>	In favor:	Benham, Burr, Clemons, DuBois-Walton, Exley, Harris, López, Prou, Reasco, Sieve
	Opposed:	0
	Abstained:	0
	Absent:	Taylor

Motion carried unanimously.

**VII. Report of the Chair**

Vice Chair López thanked Commissioner Cardona and his team for the incredible work they have been performing at this difficult time. She commended the SDE team on the Reopen Plan Webinar that was held on July 9, 2020, that provided an overview of the fall reopen plan. She expressed that the webinar was very thoughtful and provided a lot of meaningful information. Dr. López shared that upon Chair Taylor's return, she plans to talk with him about planning a return to face-to-face meetings.

**VIII. Financial Matters**

Report will be presented after agenda item X.A. below.

**IX. Consent Agenda**

Vice Chairperson López asked for a motion for the Consent agenda.

Mr. Harris moved, Mr. Clemons seconded, that the Board approve the following Consent agenda items: IX.A., Appointments to Educator Preparation Provider (EPP) Program Approval Review Committee, and IX.B., Charter Renewal Period Extensions.

A roll call vote was taken for the Consent agenda.

**A. Appointments to Educator Preparation Provider (EPP) Program Approval Review Committee**

**RESOLVED**, That the State Board of Education, pursuant to Section 10-145d-9(f)(1) of the Regulations of Connecticut State Agencies, appoints the following individuals to serve on the Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) Review Committee for the approval of Connecticut educator preparation provider (EPP) programs, effective July 14, 2020:

Name	Affiliation	Representation	Term Ending
Joseph Bonillo	Waterford Public Schools	K-12	June 30, 2023
Thomas Danehy	Area Cooperative Educational Services	K-12	June 30, 2023
Sinthia Sone-Moyano	Manchester Public Schools	K-12	June 30, 2023
Kevin Walston	Danbury Public Schools	K-12	June 30, 2023
Paul Whyte	New Haven Public Schools	K-12	June 30, 2023
Tamika La Salle	University of Connecticut	EPP	June 30, 2023
Catherine O'Callaghan	Western Connecticut State University	EPP	June 30, 2023
Julie Sochacki	University of Hartford	EPP	June 30, 2023

and directs the Commissioner to take the necessary action.

## **B. Charter Renewal Period Extensions**

**RESOLVED**, That the State Board of Education, pursuant to subsection (g) of Section 10-66bb of the Connecticut General Statutes, extends, by one year, the term of each charter school included in Table A of the Commissioner's July 14, 2020, memorandum to the State Board of Education, and directs the Commissioner to take the necessary action.

### **VOTE ON**

<b>MOTION:</b>	In favor:	Benham, Burr, Clemons, DuBois-Walton, Exley, Harris, López, Prou, Reasco, Sieve
	Opposed:	0
	Abstained:	0
	Absent:	Taylor

Motions carried unanimously.

## **X. Items for Discussion**

### **A. Connecticut's Plan for Reopening**

Commissioner Cardona opened by stating that across the world we are all facing very similar issues, but we have to make decisions based on what is best for Connecticut and that that we have the challenge of having to change course at any given point. He expressed that he recognized the challenges and concerns that people were experiencing. While Connecticut was doing well, there are no barriers to this and COVID does not know boundaries or know state borders. He said that Connecticut's success was based on the fact that we were able to follow science and make decisions based on Connecticut's data. He said that our primary focus is the health and safety of students, educators, and families.

Commissioner Cardona stated Connecticut's Reopening Plan allowed all students the opportunity to return to school full time and attend in-person classes in the fall as long as public health data continues to support this model. The Plan is fluid and will evolve based on the public health data trends as well as the understanding of the best way to mitigate the spread.

He reported that on July 24, 2020, districts should submit a plan that includes three options:

- (i) Full/Optimal. All kids come in-person to school every day.
- (ii) Hybrid. Less kids and increased mitigation strategies including space.
- (iii) Remote. Complete distance learning.

Commissioner Cardona made a point of highlighting that parents will have a choice as to whether to send their children to school. He stated that Governor Lamont was very passionate about this being a personal decision.



Deputy Commissioner Charlene Russell-Tucker presented on the health and equity aspect of the Plan. The SDE was meeting weekly with its partner the Department of Public Health. Also there was an open line of communication with local health directors making sure that they were part of the conversations and getting their feedback as districts worked on their plans. She informed that we have in statute school medical advisors based on the size of districts. She emphasized the focus of equity at the beginning of the Plan and making it explicit, and addressing what students were experiencing with social isolation and with separation from their peers and a school structure that is important for them. We are working diligently on the social emotional and mental health needs of students and educators.

- She stated that the SDE would be releasing a statewide district survey. The agency is committed to using CARES Act funds in the districts, but the agency needs to know what level of support may be needed in the districts.
- We working on having virtual office hours with pediatricians so that families can talk to doctors so they can get information on health.

Deputy Commissioner Desi Nesmith presented on the digital divide and equity. He stated that the virus had disproportionately affected communities of color, and it impacts their ability to have access to digital devices and connectivity. As an agency we will be using CARES Act funding to work with the Opportunity Districts. We will be using \$4 million from agency CARES Act funding to yield approximately 12,000 devices and will work with the ten Opportunity Districts to distribute.

- In addition to our CARES Act funding, we also are anticipating hearing from the Governor's Gear Team. We need to bridge the connectivity divide.
- Due to the fragmentation of the cable market, there is no one solution to the connectivity divide. It will require multiple solutions depending on the district as different districts will have different barriers (e.g., hotspot, broadband, etc.).

Connecticut Learning Hub. The Connecticut Learning Hub was launched on the SDE website. Everyone has access at no cost. It puts resources in the hands of Connecticut families, students and educators. The Hub is a free and interactive web page of digital resources to support online and offline learning. The CARES Act funding and Governor's Gear funding will be used to bolster the CT Learning Hub for high quality curated materials.

State Board of Education Endorsement of Connecticut's Reopening Plan. To remedy the Board not having the ability to vote on the Reopening Plan, the Board wanted to publicly support the SDE and publicly give the Plan its vote of confidence.

- We endorse the values that are driving the Plan.
- We endorse the flexibility.
- We endorse the fact there is going to be monitoring along the way to ensure equity and the health of the students, teachers, and staff.

The Board expressed its recognition of appreciation to Commissioner Cardona and the SDE team for all their hard work in developing such a comprehensive document.

The Board engaged in questions and answers with Commissioner Cardona.

### **VIII. Financial Matters**

Chief Financial Officer Kathy Demsey did not present a formal report. Ms. Demsey shared with the Board that in the next couple of weeks they would be getting the closeout for the last fiscal years. Also included will be an update on the application for the CARES Act funding and some other matters.

### **VI. Items Requiring Action (continued)**

#### **A. Material Change to Stamford Charter School for Excellence**

Mr. Harris moved, Ms. Burr seconded, that Agenda item VI.A., Material Change to Stamford School for Excellence, be removed from the table. By a show of hands the members unanimously agreed.

Vice Chair López invited Division Director Lisa Lamenzo and Attorney Matthew Venhorst to return to the Board. Ms. Lamenzo presented a revised proposed resolution with three resolutions. Vice Chair López requested that Ms. Lamenzo read the resolutions aloud:

**RESOLVED**, That the State Board of Education, pursuant to Section 10-66ss of the Connecticut General Statutes, denies the July 1, 2020, charter amendment proposal of Stamford Charter School for Excellence to the extent such proposal seeks enrollment expansion beyond the current maximum approved enrollment cap of 392, and directs the Commissioner to take the necessary action.

**RESOLVED**, That the State Board of Education, pursuant to Section 10-66ss of the Connecticut General Statutes, approves the July 1, 2020, charter amendment proposal of Stamford Charter School for Excellence to the extent such proposal seeks modification of its grade configuration to add Grade 6 in 2020-21 with a maximum approved enrollment cap of 392, and directs the Commissioner to take the necessary action.

**RESOLVED**, That the State Board of Education, pursuant to Section 10-66ss of the Connecticut General Statutes, approves the July 1, 2020, charter amendment proposal of Stamford Charter School for Excellence to the extent such proposal seeks acquisition of an additional school building, and directs the Commissioner to take the necessary action.

Discussion was held regarding the ability to present a motion with a denial resolution.

VOTE ON

MOTION:      In favor:      Benham, Burr, Clemons, Exley, Harris, López, Prou, Reasco, Sieve  
                  Opposed:      DuBois-Walton  
                  Abstained:     0  
                  Absent:        Taylor

Motion carried.

## **B. Report on Student Participation in Distance Learning**

Chief Performance Officer Ajit Gopalakrishnan presented a summary of the results from a district survey conducted on behalf of the Learn from Home Task Force by the Connecticut State Department of Education: Student Participation in Distance Learning:

*Device/Connectivity Needs, Effective Strategies, Challenges, and State Supports Needed.*

The survey gauged the approaches to distance learning during the COVID-19 pandemic, including the extent of student participation in those offerings and the barriers (especially devices and connectivity) to greater participation. In addition, the survey sought district perspectives on effective strategies to increase student participation in distance learning, the most challenging areas for getting fuller student participation, and the specific supports the State of Connecticut can provide to increase student participation in distance learning.

Mr. Gopalakrishnan summed up that the key point of this report is that the challenges with participation, the barriers to participation such as devices, connectivity, or family health trauma are concentrated in the ten Opportunity Districts. He stated that were participation challenges as well as the methods of participation. In terms of the barriers to devices and connectivity, these ten districts enrolled about 20% of our total student population statewide, but they accounted for over 44% of the students needing devices. About 35% of the students needed internet access. About 37% of the students experienced family, health trauma.

Mr. Gopalakrishnan concluded by reviewing the types of funding that are being utilized especially in the highest need districts to address the devices and connectivity issues.

Commissioner Cardona provided responsive comment to the report and ended by stating that "we will have to step up as state and serve our kids."

## **XI. Committee Reports**

### **A. Academic Standards and Assessment**

Mr. Clemons reported that the committee met on June 22, 2020, and would meet again in September.

**B. Accountability and Support**

There was no report provided.

**C. Finance, Audit, and Budget**

There was no report provided.

**D. Legislation and Policy Development**

Mrs. Benham reported that the committee met this morning. The committee reviewed three items. There was a discussion (i) on the update of the Bylaws that should be discussed at the Retreat; (ii) a review of the draft guide of the Connecticut Comprehensive Counseling Framework that will come back to the committee and will then come to the Board; and (iii) review of position statements. Mrs. Benham highlighted that Deputy Commissioner Russell-Tucker had referenced the statement, Reducing Disproportionality in Suspension and Exclusions. Mrs. Benham stated that they wanted further discussion with the Board about racial justice and equity.

**E. Connecticut Technical Education and Career System Board**

CTECS Chairman Robert Trefry provided an update to the Board. Mr. Trefry reported that a lot of work was being done on the Reopening Plan, and that a committee had been established that represented all aspects of services including the unions. The preliminary plan would be sent out for feedback. CTECS was working on a four stage plan going from full in-person to full remote. Consideration of hybrid plan model would have all the academic work online and spending all the in-school time on the trade areas where there is more need for hands-on work and then having a little time for the student to spend time with their academic teacher to catch up in addition to the online work on they would be doing on alternate weeks. Chairman Trefry thanked Commissioner Cardona for his help with the process of candidates for the CTEC Board.

**F. NASBE**

Mrs. Benham referenced that the NASBE Student Board Member Office Hours being held on Thursday, July 16, 2020 to hear student voice. She stated that Sophia Chin and Milan Chand would be participants.

Vice Chairperson López adjourned the meeting at 12:19 p.m.

Prepared by: \_\_\_\_\_  
Dr. Miguel A. Cardona, Secretary  
State Board of Education